

No 7

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As we limp out of another most "crucial/critical" year in our history into the next one, it would appear that a significant difference between this one, and the one to come, is going to be a white general election. Why? For the life of me I cannot quite figure it out. According to the normal rules of the old game, the deadline for the next general election was the end of 1985. But then the government changed the constitution and in the process engineered itself an extra  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years, (up until 1989), before it was constitutionally bound to call an election. The major argument given then was that the implementation of the new constitution needed some breathing space to settle down and that a general election too soon would be too disruptive. So? How settled are things now? Apparently settled enough to talk of a "white" election, but not a "coloured" or "Indian" one. But if there is only a "white" one in 1987 there in any case has to be a general one for all three before 1989 is through. What is the point of an exclusively white one next year?

Perhaps one could find a clue by going back to some of those referendum promises and predictions. Remember? "A major step in the right direction", "confidence in the South African economy will zoom and foreign capital will stream in", "the blacks wait with great anticipation to see if whites are ready for reform", and so on. One of the richest ones was Pik threatening that "Moscow will laugh with joy" if a no-vote is successful or something to that effect.

Now, two years after this constitutional wonder drug has been administered to the body politic of South Africa, we have a state of emergency; massive flight of capital out of the country; the greatest degree of external isolation and sanctions in our history; massive internal dissent and alienation and as far as the next "step in the right direction" is concerned, a government that flops around like a headless chicken.

In other words, what we have after the riotous referendum party, is a splendiferous, political hangover. This government has "bang-babalaas" and the State President needs a "regmaker" before he retires. He is going to call a white election so that his voters can tell him that he is not such a bad chap after all. Why cloud the message with the inevitable disruption and acrimony that "coloured" and "Indian" elections will cause? Let that be the whirlwind that his successor inherits in the 1989 General election. But for now, he needs to get the whites to : "Stand together so that we can all go forward together"; "Rally round P W in your country's hour of need"; "Forward with confidence" and so on.

Very few people know the white South African electorate as well as the State President. Not only are they blessed with the shortest memory in political history, but he knows that most of them will not vote for you unless you promise them the impossible or threaten them with the incredible. By the time we go into the election of 1987, the average white voter would have been told that we actually needed sanctions and isolation to survive and that America in collusion with Russia is leading the "total onslaught" against South Africa. Those who question this onslaught will simply be defined as part of it, and it will be "deeply unpatriotic, even treacherous" not to be prepared to "stand together". Sanctions will be used to undermine the solidarity of the HNP, CP AND AWB supporters and the "right-wing" will be used to undermine the solidarity of PFP supporters. Both will be "totally unreasonable" for not giving the President the "mandate" he so "desperately needs" to cope with the "super-human" problems that bedevil our future.

The problems are there not because we have a lousy constitution that crudely modernizes racism, or an executive that systematically side-steps accountability, or an oversized bureaucracy that wastes money on unobtainable objectives; or a government that wishes to "broaden democracy" for blacks by denying them the freedom of association. No, the fault does not lie with "us", it lies

with "them". "Them", are foreign governments, multi-nationals, liberals, communists, radicals, the clergy, agitators, the press, front-line states, ANC, SWAPO, FRELIMO, Cubans or anybody else who is not prepared or incapable of understanding "us".

Do you get the feeling of deja-vu ? Of course, the election in 1987 will be a carbon copy of the election of 1977. Then it was Vorster who told the world to "hell with you", "do your damndest", "We'll go it alone". Now it is going to be PW's turn. In the 10 years in between a few things have happened : The Info scandal; a new PM promising "clean-lean administration", constructive engagement, Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, from bi-cameral racism to tri-cameral racism, UDF, Nkomati and, of course, reform. But these incidentals do not signify that one should abandon a tried and tested formula. Vorster got his biggest election mandate before he retired; P W Botha is going to try for the same.

This is all pure speculation, of course. After all, he did not say there was going to be one next year. At the press conference after the National Party caucus, as he licked his chops and smiled mischievously into the camera, he only said that the caucus agreed that as State President he has the prerogative to decide when there will be one. Very informative stuff. Ever since, everyone has been saying there will be one for whites early next year. As I said, for the life of me, I cannot quite figure out why.